



The talking bird; or, The little girl who knew what was going to happen, by ...

Mary Kirby



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THE TALKING BIRD ;
OR,
THE LITTLE GIRL WHO KNEW WHAT
WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

BY
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ETC.

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THE TALKING BIRD.

CHAPTER I.

THE TINY OLD WOMAN.

"FRANK, do you know the snow-drops we set under the window are in bud?" cried Rose and Margaret Wilton, as their brother came in to breakfast.

"Are they? that is famous news!" replied Frank, throwing up the sash as far as it would go, and putting out his head to look.

"Frank, Frank, what are you doing!" exclaimed Rose, "Aunt Tatchet will be here directly."

"O, never mind old Tetchety!" replied Frank; "she has not finished putting her wig on yet."

"For shame Frank!" said Margaret, coming close to her brother, and laying her hand on his mouth; "I cannot bear to hear you call Aunt Tatchet names, and you know she does not wear a wig."

"Don't I know it, Mrs. Wisdom!" replied the incorrigible boy; "have not I seen her putting it straight times

without number? and as for the rest, Tatchet is her name, and Tetchety is her nature, at least ever since I can remember."

"Well, but Frank, you tease her so!" persisted Margaret; "or she would not be half so fidgetty."

"Teaze her! and I have a right to teaze her!" exclaimed Frank; "does not she keep a memorandum book, with the number of times I have pinched her cat's tail, and run away with her spectacles, written down in it, to show Uncle Wilton when he comes? I call that abominable!"

"I should like to know what sort of a man Uncle Wilton is," said Rose thoughtfully.

"He is very handsome I am sure," replied Margaret; "Aunt Tatchet once showed me his picture, and his hair, and eyes were the colour of Frank's."

"And that dear little cottage of his!" cried Rose; "I have made Aunt Tatchet describe it over and over again."

"O! I can imagine it quite well," said Margaret; "with its roses and honey-suckles climbing over the porch, and its great, great garden. Aunt says, she cannot tell me how many flowers bloom there in spring."

"And a paddock before it, with perhaps a cow, who knows?" cried Frank; "and a pond full of ducks and geese, to be killed and eaten just when they least expect it."

"I wonder he could leave such a pretty place for ten whole years to go to India," said Margaret, setting the caddy on the table, and a chair ready for Aunt Tatchet.

"I wonder a great deal more which of us two little girls he will choose to adopt and take to live with him," returned Rose; "Aunt says, he is only waiting to see us to make up his mind; I shall be so disappointed if"—

"Frank, Frank, pray shut the window!" cried Margaret; I hear Aunt Tatchet coming!"

But Frank, instead of complying with his sister's request, put on a shawl of his aunt's, that lay neatly folded on the window board. Then seating himself in her easy chair by the fire, he tied a handkerchief over his head, and twisted his face into a very comical expression of fright and misery.

"Frank! what are you doing with my shawl?" cried Miss Tatchet as she entered the room.

"O Aunt, I am so afraid of taking cold," replied Frank, coughing behind his hand; "you know how delicate I am!"

"What? is the window open?" shrieked Miss Tatchet; "Rose, Margaret, shut it this instant! I declare it has made my teeth ache already."

"And what a cold I have caught to be sure," continued Frank, in the same whimsical tone, and making a tremendous noise with his handkerchief.

Margaret instantly ran and pulled down the sash, while Rose, taking away the shawl from her brother, insisted on his giving over his nonsensical tricks, and coming to breakfast.

All this time Miss Tatchet was hunting in vain for the key of the caddy. "Surely I cannot have mislaid it,"

said she, looking in her basket; "Margaret, run up stairs, and see if I have left it on my dressing table. Well, this is provoking, and so late too, and that tiresome Barbara all behind hand! Jump up Frank, and help, you know how it harasses me to lose anything."

"With all my heart," cried Frank, springing from his chair, and knocking it over in his eagerness to assist.

But alas! Aunt Tatchet little knew how much his help would cost her.

He first rummaged her work-box, and poured out all its contents on the table, then in spite of her outcries and entreaties, he gathered them up, and cramming them in without any regard whatever to right or wrong, threw himself all his length on the floor, and began to scramble about, to be quite sure "it was not hidden in the corners."

"Frank, I cannot bear it another moment!" screamed Miss Tatchet; "get up this instant, your rude unmannnerly boy!"

Frank who was all obedience, got up directly. "I am only looking for the key, Aunt, and am very sorry I cannot find it," said he, with a face of perfect simplicity.

"Sit down do, and be quiet!" said Miss Tatchet; "and Barbara, here Barbara!"

"Yes Missis," said Barbara, putting her head in at the door as though she had been standing just behind it.

"Help me look for the key of the caddy Barbara. It has gone out of my basket. Be quick girl! what are you staring at?"

"The key of the caddy, Missis?" repeated Barbara, who was very slow of comprehension.

"Yes, the key to be sure! why do you make me say everything twice over? you know how it tires me to talk."

"Because it's in the lock, Missis, that's all," said Barbara, with a broad grin.

"In the lock!" cried Miss Tatchet, turning quickly round; "do you think I am so foolish?"—

She stopped short, for whether by magic or not the key was certainly there, and a suppressed titter from Frank, made her strongly suspect who was the cause of the mischief.

There was however no time for reproof. The postman's knock was heard, and Barbara re-entered the room, bearing a letter with a great red seal, that made it quite conspicuous.

"Can it be from Uncle Wilton?" whispered the children one to another, and their eager eyes were fixed on Miss Tatchet as she quietly put on her spectacles, and proceeded to make herself mistress of its contents. The time she took in reading the letter, seemed almost an age to the impatient little group; and nothing but the dread of fidgetting their aunt, prevented them from peeping over her shoulder.

"How worrying it is to be kept in a state of suspense! Captain Wilton says, we may expect him to day or next week, just as it happens," said Miss Tatchet, throwing the epistle on the table.

This piece of good news, was received by the children with a burst of joy.

"Then Uncle Wilton is really coming at last!" cried they in a breath; "I hope he will be here to day; don't you, Aunt Tatchet?"

"Now pray make haste and finish your breakfasts!" said Miss Tatchet, pouring out the tea in a hurry. "Dear me, what a great deal there will be to do! your Uncle might have given us a little more warning, especially as he knows how the least thing in the world upsets me."

But the children felt much more inclined to talk about Captain Wilton, than to eat up their milk and bread.

"I wonder whether he will like me the best!" said Rose, speaking her thoughts aloud.

"I shall not be at all jealous if he does!" replied Margaret, good humouredly.

"I hope he has some fun in him, and then I don't mind!" cried Frank; "I am tired of having nobody to play with but Ponto."

The removal of the breakfast things was a signal for mighty preparations to begin. The children readily offered their assistance, but they were soon found to be more of a hindrance than a help; and when Frank, who liked play better than work, bounded off into the lane, with Ponto at his heels, Barbara felt quite thankful that he, at least, "was out of the way." As for the little girls, they were more easily disposed of. Margaret was sent into the greenhouse to cut some flowers, and Rose was dispatched on an errand to the village.

It was a clear frosty morning, and as she skipped merrily

along, her heart felt light as a feather. On every side was something to admire. The trees were bare and leafless, it is true, but the hoar frost lay upon their branches like silver, and you might almost have fancied yourself in fairy-land. Here and there too, the boughs would meet, forming a kind of arch, and as Rose passed beneath, a crisp shower came rustling down, and sprinkled her from head to foot. This made her start, and shake herself as she had seen Ponto do when he had been caught in the rain. And now she came to a pond where boys were sliding, and she stood for a moment to watch them as they glided backwards and forwards, with their arms stretched out, to keep themselves from falling. One little fellow, more clumsy than the rest, fell down directly in the way, and over him went, at full speed, some half-dozen urchins unable to stop themselves in time. And there was such confusion and tumbling, and screaming and laughing, that Rose was diverted beyond measure, and if the frost had not given her fingers and toes a good sharp pinch, she might have forgotten her errand altogether. But off she ran, eager to make up for lost time, and on her way home again she resolved to pass the boys and the pond without so much as a glance.

Her thoughts returned to Captain Wilton, and she was so busy wondering how long he would stay, and above all, which he would love the best, herself or Margaret, that she did not observe the odd looking figure that kept trudging along by her side. It was a very tiny old woman, with a sharp nose, and a pair of piercing black eyes, that seemed to look you through and through. There was besides a hump on

her back, and just such an old woman had never been seen.

"Hum," cried she, as if to attract the child's attention.

At the sound of her voice, that was very like the croaking of a raven, Rose started and quickened her pace. But her companion, who was active and nimble as a bird, contrived to keep up with her step by step, and every time the little girl stole a glance round, there she was, nodding, as much as to say, "It 's of no use your running away, you see I am quite even with you."

"What are you in such hurry about, Miss Wilton?" said she at length, and coming still nearer, "are you frightened because I'm so ugly?"

"Dear me!" cried Rose, in great astonishment; "I am sure I never saw you before, and how came you to know my name?"

"That is a secret, Miss Rose," replied the old woman; "and little girls are not always to be trusted with secrets."

"O, but you may quite depend upon me!" said Rose, drawing herself up, "I can keep a secret as well as anybody."

"What! from your Aunt, Miss Tatchet, and your Uncle, Captain Wilton, that you expect to day?"

"Well, how very odd, that you should know about Aunt Tatchet and Captain Wilton;" cried Rose, more and more bewildered; "one would think you were a witch!"

"A little bird told it me," returned the old woman, with a curious twinkle in her eye.

"But birds cannot talk," said Rose contemptuously.

"Ah, can't they?" replied the old woman, "but I know better than that, and, if I chose, I could tell you every word they say."

"Why, what do they say but chirp, chirp, coo, coo, or come back, come back?" asked Rose, laughing incredulously.

"O yes, they seem to say nothing else, when they hop about in the branches, or twitter outside your bed-room window, but in truth," said the old woman, with a wise shake of her head, "the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, know a great deal more than we do."

"What do they know?" asked Rose, in a tone of curiosity.

"Just everything that is going to happen," replied the old woman, "as for instance, whether your Uncle, the Captain, is coming to-day."

"O, could they really tell me that?" cried Rose, in an extasy of joy, "I would give all the world to know."

"Nothing is so easy," replied the old woman, "you have only to ask the question."

"Supposing I had a talking bird, you mean," interrupted Rose; "O, how delightful it would be! I should be asking it questions from morning till night."

"Yes, and before the week was out, you would be glad enough to let it fly, that I can tell you," returned the old woman, stopping short, and glancing towards the stile that led into the fields.

"No, no, that I never should!" exclaimed Rose, "but do you think I shall ever have one?" and she looked eagerly into the old woman's face.

"You shall if you like," returned the old woman, "but remember, Miss Rose, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

"I should like a talking bird very much indeed," cried Rose, stooping down, for just then one of her shoes came untied, and she was obliged to fasten the string. When she had made it secure, she turned round, eager to continue the conversation, but to her surprise the tiny old woman had somehow or other disappeared. What had become of her, Rose could not imagine, and she looked to the right hand and the left, hoping to see her either at the stile or on the path before her. Not a creature was in sight, and the little girl actually burst into tears.

"It is quite too bad," sobbed she, "to go away without telling me her secret, especially when I want so much to have a talking bird."

Her head still running on the subject, she looked here and there, hoping to espy some little songster, and perhaps to hear it speak. But the winter had been unusually severe, and, except a few robins and sparrows, not a bird had dared to venture forth. At this very moment her attention was arrested by the sound of "coo, coo," from a neighbouring tree, and, to her surprise, she saw a dove hopping merrily about among the branches. It was, indeed, an odd looking bird, for its feathers were as black as jet, and its eyes so piercing and so bright, that Rose could not help thinking of the tiny old woman, who had just disappeared.

"What if this were a talking bird!" cried she, clapping her hands for joy; "O, how glad I should be, if what the old woman told me was true! Suppose I were to ask it a question? did not she say, nothing would be so easy? Come down, my pretty birdie," continued she, addressing the dove,

in a hesitating voice, for something whispered to her that the wish to know the future was far from right: "come down, and tell me whether my Uncle, the Captain is coming to-day."

"Not to-day, but to-morrow;" said the dove, and then putting its head on one side, it eyed her with a cunning look.

The sound of a bird really talking, was so new and strange, that Rose felt not a little terrified, and her first impulse was to run away. But, bye and bye, she recovered from her fright, and even ventured a glance upwards at the cause of her alarm.

"How pretty it is, to be sure!" said she to herself, "such a dear little creature as that could do me no harm; I wish I could catch it, and keep it in a cage."

But Rose found this no easy matter, for the dove was quite beyond her reach, and sat winking at her, with its sharp black eyes, as if it laughed at all her efforts. As a last resource, she drew the fragments of a bun from her pocket, and held out the crumbs. What was her delight when the dove came hopping down, and perched itself on her hand! It seemed too, perfectly tame, for it suffered her to stroke its feathers and rub its head against her cheek. Rose felt eager to display the new pet at home, and hurried along, congratulating herself on this happy stroke of fortune.

"How nice it will be know everything that is going to happen!" said she, as she tripped lightly up the lane, "I shall now be the wisest person in the world."

But in the midst of her exultation, conscience again

whispered to her that all was not right, and that the knowledge of the future, forbidden us by a wise Providence, could do her no good.

These thoughts made her rather uneasy, and she felt half inclined to let the bird go.

"But then, what a pity that would be," said she, as she reached the garden gate; "it has already told me what I wanted to know. I can but try it, and, if it does me any harm, nothing will be so easy as to let it fly."

CHAPTER II.

ROSE HIDING THE DOVE.

WHILE Rose was engaged with the tiny old woman and her talking birds, an unusual bustle had been going on at home, and it might truly be said, "the whole house was being turned out of window." Miss Tatchet's health did not allow of any great exertion, but she kept fidgitting backwards and forwards from the parlour to the kitchen, and the kitchen to the parlour, and ringing the bell every other minute to ascertain how Barbara was getting on, or to remind her of something she had not forgotten. In fact, she threw herself into such an agitation, that before the morning was half over, she was obliged to retire to the drawing-room, where she lay down upon the sofa, "quite worn out."

Now this apartment, which was only used on high-days and holidays, had just been put in apple-pie order. A pretty vase of flowers, arranged by Margaret, stood in the centre of the table; the furniture was uncovered, that the gay damask chairs might appear in all their glory; and the carpet shone

out so fresh and new, it seemed a sacrilege to set a foot upon it. Fatigued as Miss Tatchet was, she could not help observing that the effect was highly satisfactory, and as there was nothing either to find fault with, or to mend, she covered her face with her handkerchief, and resigned herself to repose. But no sooner had she closed her eyes, than the door opened, and in came Frank followed by Rose and Margaret.

"O Aunt, do look!" cried they, "Rose has found such a beautiful bird! It is a dove, all black, and it says coo, coo, so prettily."

"I wish you children would keep out of the room, while I am lying down," said Miss Tatchet, whose aversion to birds was quite proverbial; "I never can have a moment's quiet."

"But Aunt, do just look at its eyes how sharp and bright they are! and it winks so cunningly," cried Rose, holding it out for her aunt to see.

"It is an ugly little creature," said Miss Tatchet, ungraciously, "and birds are such noisy things; I think you had a great deal better let it go."

"O, but Aunt, I have had so much trouble to catch it;" said Rose, imploringly; "you cannot think how long I was trying to coax it down from the tree."

"Well, if you keep it up stairs out of my sight, I don't so much mind," returned Miss Tatchet, "it would fidget me beyond anything, to see it hopping about in the parlour."

"We must have a cage, or Ponto will make quick work

of it," cried Frank; "there is a capital one in the lumber-room, that might have been made on purpose."

"It will be your own fault if Ponto does, Frank," said Miss Tatchet, "I have forbidden you, over and over again, to let that dog loose. And pray don't get yourself all over dirt, just when your uncle is coming."

"He is not coming to-day, but to-morrow, Aunt;" said Rose, drawing herself up, and feeling quite proud of her knowledge.

"And how do you know, when he is coming?" asked Miss Tatchet, raising her head.

"A little bird told it me," replied Rose, with a complacent smile.

"What nonsense!" returned Miss Tatchet, lying down again and closing her eyes, "run along, all of you, and tell Barbara to get my lunch ready, or the coach will be in before I have had time to eat it."

Rose felt very much offended that so little importance was attached to her information, and as she followed her sister up stairs, a cloud of disappointment gathered on her brow. She stood and looked on with an abstracted air, while Margaret contrived a nest for the dove, in the corner of the window board, where the sun shone in the brightest. "How can I make her understand the old woman's secret?" thought she, for until this moment, neither of the two little girls had a sorrow or a joy unshared by the other; "and of what use will the dove be, unless it may talk?"

"O Rose, see how it pecks at the lump of sugar I

have given it," said Margaret, joyfully; "I hope it will never be so ungrateful as to fly away! don't you?"

"That would be a pity indeed!" returned Rose in a tone of unusual gravity.

"But you need not look so serious," interrupted Margaret; "it seems as if it would make itself very happy and contented;" and she smoothed down its feathers, and stroked its pretty little head.

"Margaret," began Rose, drawing a long breath, as though something important were on her mind, "Margaret, do you know there is a more wonderful thing about that dove, than merely its feathers being black?"

"Its feathers are not so very extraordinary," replied Margaret; "I remember we were reading but yesterday of the black doves of Dodona that could talk."

"Yes, and my dove can talk too!" said Rose quickly, and feeling relieved of a great secret.

"You are joking now, Rose!" said Margaret; "only parrots can talk, and very noisy and disagreeable they are. I am glad you did not find a parrot, for what would Aunt Tatchet have done then?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Rose, coming close up to her sister and lowering her voice; "but O Margaret, I met this morning the oddest old woman I have ever seen, she was not higher than that!"

"Why she must have been a dwarf!" said Margaret, who still thought that Rose was making believe.

"O no, she was not a dwarf, but she knew my name,

and all about me, and Aunt Tatchet, and Captain Wilton too; only think of that, Margaret!"

"And did she tell you that Captain Wilton was not coming to-day?" asked Margaret, in a tone of surprise.

"O no, but she told me a secret more wonderful than that; she says that birds can talk, and tell us everything that is going to happen!"

"What a wicked old woman she must have been!" said Margaret; "I would not have listened to a word she had to say; it is quite impossible for anybody to know what is going to happen."

"Birds do though, I am certain," said Rose; "for directly she was gone, I found this dove; I asked it whether my Uncle was coming to day, and it said not to-day but to-morrow;" and Rose nodded mysteriously.

"I never heard of such a thing in my life!" said Margaret, retreating from the dove, and turning pale with terror.

"Well, you need not be frightened," said Rose, "but just ask it a question yourself, and see whether it will not answer you."

"Oh no, I would not be so wicked for the world!" cried Margaret.

"I don't think it would be wicked at all," interrupted Rose; "nothing would be more delightful than to know what was going to happen."

Margaret shook her head. "Rose," said she earnestly, "do be advised, and let this wicked dove fly away."

"A likely matter indeed, when I have had so much

trouble to catch it!" said Rose; "the old woman promised me a talking bird, at least, she said I might have one if I liked."

"But you would not like to do wrong," continued Margaret, resolved to maintain her point.

"Why not exactly, but what harm can it do me to know when my uncle is coming?"

"But you have no right to know it!" said Margaret, firmly; "besides, Aunt Tatchet says, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

Rose started, and her heart again misgave her, for these were the very words of the old woman, just before she disappeared. Conscience loudly warned her to let the bird escape, but alas! the fatal wish to pry into the future had taken possession of her mind, and she stood silent and perplexed.

"Let me run and ask Aunt Tatchet what we had better do," said Margaret; "she is so much older and wiser than we are."

"O no, pray don't," cried Rose, darting to the door to prevent her; "Aunt would be certain to take the bird away, and then I should wish I had never told you."

"But Rose, think how wicked it would be to keep a secret from Aunt Tatchet," said Margaret, looking very much distressed; "I am sure she would not take the bird away, unless it was wrong to keep it."

"She would say it was wrong whether it is or not, for she hates birds," cried Rose, impatiently; "I had much rather let it go myself."

"Then let it go, Rose, pray do," said Margaret in a supplicating tone.

"Well, well," said Rose; "be quiet now, and we will talk about it some other time."

"But I must tell Aunt Tatchet, I must indeed," persisted Margaret: "I cannot be happy a single minute unless I do."

"O Margaret, how tiresome you are," cried Rose; "I wish I had never told you."

"I am very glad you did," said Margaret earnestly. "But shall I open the window, and let the dove fly?"

"No, no; I will do it myself; I will do it myself," cried Rose, running to take the bird in her hand. "Only see how gentle it looks. It cannot possibly do us any harm."

"If it were like other doves it could not," replied Margaret; "but if it talks and tells us things we have no right to know, I think it might do a great deal of mischief."

"But we need not ask it any questions unless we choose, and then it would be just like other doves," argued Rose.

"Ah, Rose, don't let us be tempted to keep it, or we shall be sure to repent," said Margaret, going to raise the sash. "Come, let it go at once, or I must really tell Aunt Tatchet."

"O no; I will let it go myself, I faithfully promise that I will," said Rose, caressing her new pet; "only let me make a little fuss with it first. Remember it was I who had all the trouble of catching it."

"I wish you had never seen it, or the old woman either," said Margaret gravely; "however, it cannot do us any harm now you are going to let it fly."

"But then you wont tell Aunt Tatchet a word about it," said Rose, drawing back from the window.

"Very well, I won't, if that contents you," replied Margaret; "any thing to get rid of that wicked talking bird."

But, by and bye, when Rose was left alone with the dove in her hand, she began to repent her hasty promise. At first, indeed, the idea of breaking her word and deceiving Margaret never for a moment occurred to her; but she kissed and caressed her pretty pet, and sighed to think how soon it would be gone, past recall, and far beyond her reach.

"I wish I had kept it secret," said she to herself, "I might have hidden it in the lumber room, where nobody ever goes. How nice it would have been! I could have fed it, and run and asked it questions whenever I pleased. And now I am obliged to let it go, just because Margaret is so contradictory. I have a great mind to keep it," continued she, after a pause. "I should know to-morrow whether it has told me the truth. Suppose I were to wait till then, I shall not have told a story, because I do mean to let it go."

Rose sat down and argued the matter over and over again, and after a great deal of consideration, she resolved to keep the bird at all events until to-morrow.

"Then we shall see whether it is to be trusted," said she, as she stole cautiously to the lumber-room, peeping in every direction lest Margaret should see her.

Frank had already pounced upon the cage, and carried it off. She was therefore obliged to secure the dove by a string, to prevent its getting away. Having done this, she went to rejoin her sister, and tried to banish all unpleasant reflections by a game at play.

In the meantime, Aunt Tatchet was endeavouring, without success, to compose her nerves and get a little sleep. For a few seconds, all was perfectly quiet, and she was fast sinking into a doze, when a loud clatter in the hall made her start, and Frank most unceremoniously rushed into the room.

"O Aunt," cried he, "see what a beautiful cage I have found, with gilt wires to it; only do look!"

"How you have made me jump, to be sure!" said Miss Tatchet, putting her hand to her side, "nobody but you would ever think of bursting in, in that manner."

"I am really very sorry, Aunt," said Frank, who was swinging the cage backwards and forwards in his hand.

"And you have left all the doors open, into the bargain," continued Miss Tatchet; "we shall be blown up the chimney in another minute."

But before Frank had time to prevent such a catastrophe, patter, patter, along the hall, and in trotted Ponto, wagging his tail, and highly delighted to find himself in such good company. This was the climax of poor Miss Tatchet's misfortunes.

"O Frank, Frank, turn him out!" exclaimed she, in an agony of terror.

"Don't be frightened, Aunt; I am sure he won't hurt you," said Frank. "Down, Ponto, down, my good fellow!" for the dog, as full of frolic as his master, was capering about, and performing a thousand antics.

"I am frightened to death!" shrieked Miss Tatchet, running into a corner and holding a chair before her. "Do as you are bid, Frank, and turn him out this instant!"

To turn him out was, however, by no means so easy, for Ponto seemed to think it capital fun to scamper round and round the room, paddling it all over with his dirty wet feet; now on the chairs, now thrusting himself among the window-curtains, now trying to sniff at the flowers on the table, and now setting up his tail and making a dart at Miss Tatchet. Frank, on his part, was no less diverted than Ponto, and did not mend the matter by his awkward attempts to get the dog out of the room.

"Good gracious heart! why if Ponto ain't got loose in the drawing-room," said Barbara, who now appeared in the doorway, carrying the delicate broiled chicken, that was to serve for her mistress's lunch.

"O Barbara, pray fetch a stick and turn the dog out!" cried Miss Tatchet, who was ready to faint with fright and exhaustion.

"To be sure, missis; now don't go a flurrying yourself like that," said Barbara; "and you, master Frank, give over making such a distraction, it's enough to deafen one of both ears."



"I am only driving Ponto out of the room, as Aunt told me," said Frank, pulling the dog from under the sofa by the tail.

"Stay you still, and see if I wont manage him," cried Barbara, setting down the tray and running to fetch her broom.

Now the broiled chicken had a very savory smell, and being placed conveniently within Ponto's reach, would have been irresistible to the most honest dog that ever lived. Ponto did not discuss the matter for an instant, but snapping it up, he scampered away, nearly upsetting Barbara and her broom, whom he encountered in the passage.

"Well, who would have thought it," cried Barbara, in a tone of vexation, "after I had cooked it to a turn, with bread-sauce and gravy, all for that great greedy beast to gobble up!"

"It's Frank's doing entirely," said Miss Tatchet, coming out of her corner; "I shall tell his uncle of his conduct the very minute he gets here."

"I could not help it, Aunt Tatchet," said Frank, who secretly regretted the game was over; "Ponto came in of his own accord."

"Yes, because you always will leave the doors open," continued Miss Tatchet, throwing herself on the sofa; "and what business had you to let him loose?"

"I thought it would do him good," said Frank, nothing daunted at his misfortune. "I am sure, Aunt, you would not like to be shut up all day in a kennel, with a chain round your neck."

"What is the matter?" cried Rose and Margaret, who had come running down stairs to ascertain the cause of the uproar."

"Matter!" cried Barbara; "we have had Ponto and master Frank together at their tricks; and if that ain't enough, I don't know what is."

"Frank is a naughty boy to tease you so," said Margaret, kissing her aunt affectionately; "I hope he will learn to behave better by and bye."

"We have had a little note from Fanny Elton, Aunt," said Rose, stealing round the sofa, and speaking in a subdued tone.

"Don't tease me about Fanny Elton, or Fanny anybody else, until I have had my lunch," interrupted Miss Tatchet, pettishly. "That abominable Ponto has just eaten it up."

"She wants us to go and spend the day with her, Aunt," continued Rose, "that she may show us her beautiful new doll. Do you know, it can say 'mamma' and 'papa,' and move its head about like a baby?"

"And what would your uncle say if you were out of the way when he came?" asked Miss Tatchet, applying her smelling salts.

"He will not come to-day, but to-morrow, I am sure," said Rose emphatically; "so please, dear Aunt, do let us go."

"How very knowing you are, Rose," said Miss Tatchet, ironically; "your wisdom is worth a great deal, I dare say."

"Then we may go," said Rose eagerly, and pulling her sister towards the door.

"Indeed, you may do nothing of the kind," returned Miss Tatchet, "so say no more about it, but go and change your frocks, or Captain Wilton will be here before you are ready for him."

There was no help for it; and Rose, disappointed beyond measure, followed her sister up stairs, twisting the tempting little billet backwards and forwards over her finger. Margaret, who had never seriously indulged a thought of the visit, began to reach out her best frock, and to arrange her hair, singing merrily the while.

"Pray make haste," said she, stopping short and noticing the gloom that overspread Rose's face, "we have not a minute to lose."

"Don't begin to lecture me," returned Rose sullenly; "I shall do just as I please."

Margaret looked very much astonished.

"Rose is disappointed, and that makes her so cross," said she to herself; "suppose I were to coax her a little, and try to make her better."

But all Margaret's good-natured attempts, both at coaxing and entreating, proved quite unsuccessful; and when she had finished dressing, she was obliged to run down to Aunt Tatchet, leaving her sister in the same resolute ill-humour.

"There is no pleasure in my Uncle coming now," said she sorrowfully, as she seated herself on a stool by the drawing-room fire. "Rose is sure to get punished, and it all comes of that wicked old woman and her talking bird!"

Rose, left alone, continued to argue with herself whether or not she should accept her little friend's invitation.

"I have a great mind to go," said she, "for Aunt Tatchet cannot be expected to know so much as I do; and what is the good of a talking bird, unless I make use of my knowledge?"

These thoughts occurred again and again, and seemed to increase, as such thoughts, if indulged, usually do, in force and intensity. In fact, her reasons for going, in the end, were so clear and plain, that she tied on her bonnet, and felt as if the whole affair were a matter of duty instead of disobedience. She was soon on her way to Mr. Elton's, but somehow or other, her step was not so light as it had been a few hours ago. The sky was clear and intensely blue, the trees beautiful as before, and the boys still sliding away upon the pond. But Rose's heart was ill at ease, and in spite of all her arguments, and all her knowledge, she had a secret feeling she was doing wrong. She rang at the bell with rather a trembling hand, and glanced towards the play-room window, expecting to see her little friend upon the watch. But no Fanny was there.

"I am come to spend the day with Miss Elton," said she to the servant who opened the door.

"That is very unlucky, Miss," replied the girl, "for master and the young lady are just gone out."

"But Miss Elton sent to invite me," said Rose, without moving from the step.

"Yes Miss, but your aunt sent word that it wasn't convenient, because a gentleman was coming, Captain—I forget his name, and then master ordered the carriage, and away they went."

"How very tiresome," said Rose, peevishly; "I dare say they will call at Aunt Tatchet's, and then what a pretty scrape I shall be in!"

"This comes of having a talking bird!" thought she, as she turned her steps homewards. "I wish I had never asked it when my Uncle was coming."

She consoled herself, however, by thinking that she had been absent but a very short time, and might, perhaps, escape detection, by creeping up stairs unperceived. But no such good fortune awaited her. Aunt Tatchet, whose strength had been recruited by a second and more successful lunch, was again veering between the kitchen and the parlour, and encountered the little girl in the hall.

"And pray, Miss Rose, where have you been to, with your bonnet and tippet on?" asked she, very much surprised.

"O Rose dear!" cried Margaret, running out of the drawing-room, "I have been looking for you everywhere. Fanny Elton has been here with her beautiful new doll, and it is more wonderful than any doll I have ever seen."

"How provoking, to be sure!" said Rose, ready to burst into tears.

"Provoking enough, to be out of the way when you are wanted," said Miss Tatchet. "Where have you been to?"

"To Mr. Elton's, Aunt," said Rose, blushing deeply, and hanging down her head.

"What! when I told you to stay at home, because your Uncle was coming?" said Miss Tatchet, "as it happens,

the coach is in without him, but he might just as well have been here."

"I knew he would not come to-day," said Rose, triumphantly.

"Don't tell such a story, Rose," said Miss Tatchet angrily; "you knew no more about it than I did."

"I never told a story in my life, Aunt," cried Rose, "but I knew the Captain—"

"Go along with you, directly, you naughty child," said Miss Tatchet, enraged at her pertinacity; "and whether the Captain comes or not, you shall be shut up in your own room all day, to punish your disobedient conduct."

Here was, indeed, a terrible scrape, and poor Rose begged and prayed, in vain, to be forgiven. Miss Tatchet took no notice of her sobs and tears, but following her up stairs, set her a double lesson to learn, and then turned the key, and left her to her own reflections.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN'S ARRIVAL.

THE arrival of the stage-coach at the retired village of Wells, though it occurred every day all the year round, never failed to be an event of great interest and importance. At such times the village children, with open mouths, and eyes brim full of curiosity, invariably assembled near the porch of the "Pheasant and Crown"; and here and there a knot of school-boys would linger on the watch, and beguile the time with leap-frog, or a game at marbles. Happy was he who first caught sight of the horses, as they gained the summit of the neighbouring hill. Caps were flung into the air, hands clapped with boyish delight, and a loud "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" was shouted at the pitch of their voices, by the joyous little group. After this the plot would thicken fast. Out popped the landlord, with his round merry face, and clean white apron. Ostlers and stable-boys began to be in a state of excitement, and even the pretty barmaid would take advantage of the confusion, to smooth her ringlets at the twice-cracked mirror over the

parlor mantel-piece. But all is not gold that glitters, and it often happened that a rough grazier, or a buxom servant girl, with her handbox on her lap, was the only result of a whole hour's watching. Then the schoolboys, whose quick eyes searched out the contents of the coach in an instant, would whisper to each other, that it was "no go," and turning on their heels, walk quietly away. The pretty bar-maid would toss her head disdainfully, and the landlord thrust his hands into his pockets, and whistle to hide his vexation. But on the morrow all was smooth again, and the landlord, the village children, and the schoolboys, were in the same state of joyous expectation.

On this particular occasion, however, their patience was put to a severer trial than usual. The church clock has twice struck the hour, and yet no coach is to be seen. What can be the reason? Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah! there it comes; the horses toiling along as if the burden were terribly heavy. Who can it be? Some great stranger, no doubt. Perhaps a duke, or a lord, or even a prince in disguise. Who knows? And the schoolboys buzzed about the coach, peeping over each other's shoulders, and almost pushing each other down in their eagerness to look.

"Well, my lads, what now?" said a good-natured voice from out a pile of cloaks and furs, "Did you expect to see the wonderful dwarf, or the giant who lived in the bean-stalk? if so, I am happy to say you will be disappointed."

At this singular address, the boys fell back in great alarm, and a few of the little ones ran away; while the stranger proceeded to stretch his arms and his legs, as if to

make sure they were capable of motion. He then gaped and yawned, and finally jumped out, cloaks, furs, and all, and stood up full six feet in height.

"And now," said he, looking round, "can any of you young urchins tell me where a certain Miss Titch, Tatch, Tetchet, lives? that's her name, I think."

"Oh dear, yes, sir," replied the landlord, edging himself forward, "and a very excellent lady she is, sir, only rather ailing sometimes, poor thing."

"And how far is it from here?" asked the stranger.

"Three-quarters of a mile, sir," cried all the boys at once.

"No such thing, you little rascals," said the landlord, pushing them to the right and left, "its two good miles at least, if it's a step, any day; and do you think his honor is like to walk off on his ten toes, without taking bit or drop at the sign of the 'Pheasant and Crown?'"

The schoolboys were now thoroughly discomfited, and taking up their satchels, flung them carelessly over their shoulders. But it was quite impossible for them to depart without satisfying their curiosity as to who the mysterious stranger could be, and the same quick eyes that had detected him in the corner of the coach, read in a moment the direction on his portmanteau. A murmur of "Captain Wilton, Captain Wilton!" ran through the little group, and was eagerly caught up by the landlord.

"Captain Wilton, is it not?" said he, bowing and rubbing his hands. "Pray walk in, sir. Master Frank was here yesterday, sir, to meet the coach, and was terribly disap-

pointed that his uncle did not come. Pray walk in." And the landlord, still bowing and smiling, led the way into the parlor.

"A chaise to Miss Tatchet's, as soon as possible," said the captain, seating himself in front of the fire, and stirring it round with the poker.

"To be sure, sir," replied the landlord, "to be sure. The horses shall be in, in two minutes, sir. But won't your honor take a snack of something or other, just to keep the cold out? It's sharp work, travelling, this weather," added he, as the pretty barmaid made her appearance with the tray of refreshments.

"O, yes, that I will," said the captain, good humouredly, and turning to the table, "Let us drink to the health of merry old England; here we go—Old England for ever!" and he waved his glass in the air.

"That's right, sir," said the landlord warmly, "Old England for ever, sir!"

"Old England for ever!" simpered the pretty barmaid.

"Old England for ever!" shouted the little urchins outside, while ostlers and stable-boys joined in the chorus with true national enthusiasm.

Captain Wilton was then really come, and Rose, who knew the very moment he was likely to arrive at Aunt Tatchet's, was in a flutter of joy and expectation.

"I am determined to wear my best frock to day," said she, taking it from the drawer, and beginning to dress with unusual care. "The coach will be here directly; and then, O how delightful! But supposing he should like Margaret

the best,"—and her countenance clouded over: "that would be very hard. I wonder if—but what need I wonder; have not I a talking bird? I declare I will ask it this minute"; and Rose, her curls half in order, and half in confusion, ran to the lumber room, where the dove now sat perched in its new cage. "So you have eaten your lump of sugar, have you, my pretty pet?" said she caressingly, "and expect me to bring you another. But stay a minute, you must tell me a secret first. Come here, and whisper; which will Captain Wilton love the best, Rose or Margaret?"

The dove cocked its head on one side, and eyed her with a mischievous look.

"Come, come," said Rose, impatiently, "open your little beak, and let the words pop out—Which will he love the best, Rose or Margaret?"

"Margaret," said the dove, timidly, and then fluttered away to its nest in the corner of the cage.

"Margaret"! exclaimed Rose, uncertain whether she had heard aright.

"Margaret," repeated the dove, in a clear distinct voice, that admitted of no mistake.

"I cannot believe it," said Rose, sitting down and feeling ready to cry; "so much as I longed for him to come, and have lain awake all night thinking about it—and now he is going to love Margaret best. I wish I had not asked." And as she returned to her own room, tears of vexation began to course each other down her cheeks.

"Why, Rose, what are you crying about?" asked Mar-

garet, who came at this moment skipping and jumping up stairs.

"Nothing at all," replied Rose, with a sullen air, and ill-pleased at the interruption.

"But surely, Rose, you would not cry for nothing," said Margaret, running to put her arms round her sister's neck.

"Get away, you tiresome little thing," said Rose, pettishly, "I am not in the humour to be teased just now."

"Teazed! O, Rose, what can be the matter? You are not yourself to-day."

"Not myself, indeed!" said Rose angrily; "I dare say you want to make me ever so disagreeable, that Uncle Wilton may love you the best."

"I don't want to do anything of the kind, I am sure," said Margaret warmly; "and if I did, Rose, I should not expect uncle to love me at all."

"O yes, he would though," said Rose, disconsolately, "nothing can prevent his liking you."

"What nonsense you are talking, Rose," said Margaret, laughing, "a great many things may. But I wonder that should make you so miserable," added she, looking at her sister with a puzzled air.

"I cannot help being miserable," said Rose, hiding her face in her hands. "I have done nothing but think of Uncle Wilton, and his pretty little cottage, from morning till night, and now I shall have to live all my life with Aunt Tatchet," and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"O, no, that you won't, Rose, I am certain," said Margaret, trying to soothe her; "everybody is fond of you,

because you are so clever. Besides, uncle has not seen us yet, and it is quite impossible to say which of us he will choose."

"Yes, it is," said Rose, passionately. "I know he will love Margaret the best," and she set her teeth together as though she would grind the words to pieces.

"Now if you little girls are quarreling, I desire you give over this minute," said Miss Tatchet, making her appearance, and muffled up in a shawl, because the up-stairs rooms always gave her cold: "nothing upsets my nerves like quarreling."

"I was not quarreling, aunt, I am sure," said Rose, sulkily, "but Margaret keeps teasing me so."

"And why are you putting on your best frock, I should like to know?" asked Miss Tatchet.

"Because Captain Wilton is coming to-day," said Rose, triumphantly.

"What a tiresome, pertinacious girl you are," said Miss Tatchet, "any one would suppose you knew more of your uncle's proceedings than I did."

"But indeed, Aunt, I am quite certain he is coming to-day," said Rose, emphatically.

"How you do worry me by saying the same thing over and over again," said Miss Tatchet, "I declare I have a great mind to send you to bed."

"O, no, Aunt, not to bed, when Uncle Wilton—"

"Now if you say it over again, you really shall go to bed," said Miss Tatchet, angrily: "so take off your frock, and put it back into the drawer."

Rose stood uncertain what to do, for the clock on the mantelpiece told her that the coach must be already in. The desire to appear to the best advantage was strong in her mind, "but, then, what does it matter?" thought she, "he is sure to love Margaret best," and irritated beyond measure, she pulled violently at the hooks and eyes of her new frock. Margaret ran to help, but was pushed rudely on one side, and at this identical moment a chaise and pair rattled up the lane. Rose, who was on the alert, sprang hastily to the window to look. Her foot became entangled in her dress, but, heedless of the impediment, she dragged it after her, and actually caught sight of the Captain as he alighted at Miss Tatchet's door. "He is come; he is come," cried she, jumping for joy. "O, I told you he would—it is Captain Wilton, Aunt Tatchet—it is Captain Wilton."

But Aunt Tatchet, instead of making any answer, pulled Rose from the window with no very gentle hand: "You naughty child, only look how you have torn your frock," said she, administering sundry sharp slaps; "I declare you have ripped it from top to bottom."

"O, Aunt, it is Captain Wilton, do let me go," cried Rose, struggling to free herself. "You see I was right when I told you he would come to-day."

"Whether he is come or not you shall go to bed, and this very minute too," said Miss Tatchet, who was now thoroughly provoked, "you have put me quite into an agitation."

"O, Missis, if here is'nt the Captain after all!" cried

Barbara, running to announce the visitor, "in a post-chaise, and with his portmanteau along with him."

"Dear! dear! who would have thought it?" said Miss Tatchet, shaking in every limb; "how inconsiderate he is to take me by surprise."

"And so as we were looking for him all day yesterday," rejoined Barbara, feeling at the moment as much aggrieved as her mistress. "I can't abide folks as doesn't keep their word."

"Run down, Barbara, and light a fire in the drawing-room, and you, Margaret, go and speak to your Uncle, and say I am coming directly," continued Miss Tatchet.

"But you will forgive Rose now, Aunt," said Margaret, joyfully. "O, how glad I am Uncle Wilton is come!"

"Do as I bid you, Margaret, and leave Rose to me," said Miss Tatchet, in no encouraging tone, "her naughty conduct cannot go unpunished."

"But she will never do so any more, Aunt, I am certain," cried Margaret, "so do forgive her this once, please, pray do!" and she joined her hands in the earnestness of her entreaty.

"Rose must be punished, so don't say another word about it," said Miss Tatchet, who had a great dread of spoilt children, and attributed all their faults to over-indulgence, "she shall go to bed directly, and, what is more, I shall tell her Uncle how provoking she has been."

This was the sorest trial of all to poor Rose, and her sobs and tears prevented her uttering a word. "It is the dove's fault," thought she as she lay down in her pretty white

bed opposite the window. "I wish I had never asked it when my uncle was coming, and that I had let it fly; Margaret is a great deal happier than I am," and, with a deep sigh, she hid her face in the pillow, and felt as if all her misfortunes had been brought upon her by the talking bird.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSE IN DANGER.

"AND so, Captain Wilton, you think of choosing the eldest of my little nieces," said Miss Tatchet, as she and the Captain were sitting over the fire the morning after his arrival; "well, nothing can please me better, for Margaret was always my favourite."

"I must see them both before I make up my mind," returned the Captain, "but I have rather set my heart upon Rose. How unfortunate that she should happen to be in disgrace the very day I came!"

"Perhaps the thought of seeing her Uncle turned her brain a little," said Miss Tatchet, smiling; "I never remember her to have been so naughty before."

"Bless the child, how I long to see her! and that boy Frank, what a fine fellow he has grown! We must have him out at sea some of these days, and who knows but we may make an admiral of him?"

"I doubt if Frank will ever make anything that is comfortable," said Miss Tatchet, shaking her head; "he is the most mischievous boy that ever lived."

“Ah! he looks to have plenty of spirit in him; but boys are none the worse for that,” returned the Captain; “and he will stand a chance of being kept in order, now his Uncle is come home.”

“But you have no idea what the boy really is,” said Miss Tatchet, emphatically. “I have noted down a few of his tricks in this little memorandum-book,” and she drew it from her pocket.

“Indeed, madam,” replied the Captain, “that is quite a new way of proceeding. In my day it was thought hardly fair to tell tales out of school.”

“I have no scruple about it in this case,” returned Miss Tatchet; “I always threatened what I would do when his uncle came home.”

“But had we not better wait until the lad is here to defend himself?” said the Captain, rather uncomfortable, and anxious to escape.

“Oh, no, he would be sure to dance the hornpipe, or make some noise to disturb us,” said Miss Tatchet, opening her book; “I am only too thankful to have him out of the way.”

“Of course it must be as you please, Madam, I never venture to contradict a lady,” returned the Captain, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and resigning himself to his fate.

“Well, then,” said Miss Tatchet, clearing up to improve her voice, “the first thing that stands against him is, on a certain Monday morning, a letter of importance was brought in, and I could nowhere find my spectacles. I hunted



for them till I was quite tired, and had just laid myself down completely exhausted, when who should bounce through the open window, but Ponto—and, would you believe it? the identical spectacles were on his nose!”

“Capital!” shouted the Captain; “I could not have done it better myself! Ponto with your spectacles on his nose. It was too good.” And he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

“I cannot understand your being so much diverted,” said Miss Tatchet, putting away the memorandum book, in high displeasure, “unless, indeed, you are an encourager of practical jokes.”

“I beg your pardon, madam, for being so rude,” said the Captain; “but the trick was excellent! really excellent!” And he tried in vain to suppress a fresh burst of laughter.

Miss Tatchet looked mortified and angry; and the Captain, who had no intention of offending her, quickly recovered his gravity, and did his best to soothe her ruffled feelings. But he had hardly succeeded in restoring her good humour, when a succession of little footsteps was heard in the hall, and the three children ran into the room.

Poor Rose crept behind her sister like a culprit, and scarcely dared look at her uncle lest she should be reminded of yesterday's disgrace. Her heart beat very fast and her colour went and came as Captain Wilton, holding out his hand, drew her gently towards him.

“My eldest niece, I suppose,” said he. “Come here, my little girl, and tell me how you like me.”

"I shall like you very much indeed, Uncle," said Rose, her eyes sparkling, and her face brightening into smiles.

"That's right," said the Captain, kindly, "I foresee we shall be excellent friends by and bye. Your sister here has crept into my heart already."

Rose withdrew her hand as though a serpent had stung her.

"Ah, I knew you would love Margaret best," said she, unable to control the bitterness of her feelings.

"Heyday, what jealous?" cried the Captain; "but how do you know I shall love Margaret the best?"

"O because a little bird—I mean to say—I know you will," said Rose, very much confused.

"It will be your own fault if I do," returned the Captain, who was extremely puzzled by the child's behaviour.

"O, Uncle," cried Rose, sadly, "I did so want you to be fond of me, and looked so eagerly for you to come; Aunt Tatchet knows I did."

"Yes, indeed, I do," interrupted Miss Tatchet; "there was nothing but Uncle Wilton, Uncle Wilton, from morning till night."

"Thank you my little niece," said the Captain, kissing her affectionately; "but now I am come, do not let a foolish fancy spoil the pleasure of my visit."

A summons to breakfast put an end to the conversation; but as Rose took her seat at the table, her face, instead of wearing its usual happy expression, became gloomy and morose. Every word and look that passed

between Margaret and her Uncle, caused a sharp pang to her heart.

"How she tries to get into his good graces," thought she; "there is no chance for me, he is sure to love Margaret best," and with difficulty she kept back the tears that started to her eyes.

"I think of giving you little ones a treat to-night," said the Captain, when the breakfast things were cleared away. "What do you say to it? shall you be willing?"

"O, yes, Uncle; thank you, thank you!" cried the children. "How delightful! but do tell us what sort of a treat it will be?" And they all crowded round him at once.

"No, no, that is not in the bargain," said the Captain, playfully; "my treat is to be a surprise."

"Then I dare say it is a Christmas-tree," cried Frank, capering about on the hearth-rug.

"O, yes; and Uncle has brought it with him from India," said Margaret, with great simplicity.

"And it is in that box that stands in the hall," added Rose, brightening up at the thought.

"You are all quite wrong," said the Captain, laughing; "however, the box has something to do with it, and I must have it brought in to unpack."

"And we may help you, Uncle, may we not?" said Rose; "how nice it will be! I like nothing so much as unpacking."

"Indeed, I shall turn every one of you out, and lock the

door before I begin," said the Captain; "half the treat would be gone if you knew what was coming."

"O, Uncle, turn us out?" cried the children, their faces growing very blank; "but how long shall we have to wait?"

"Until after tea. I shall not be ready one moment sooner. Do you think your patience can hold out till then?"

"No, I don't think it can," cried Rose; "suppose I were to peep." And she gave her uncle a cunning look.

"I should be very angry if you did, and not allow you to see it at all," said the Captain gravely.

"Rose was only joking, Uncle, I am sure," interrupted Margaret; "she never did such a thing in her life."

"You are a good child, Margaret, and a famous little advocate," said the Captain, patting her kindly on the head.

A gloom overspread Rose's face at these words, and the feeling of jealousy became stronger than ever in her mind.

"I do wonder what this surprise is," whispered Margaret, drawing her sister into the old-fashioned window-seat. "Rose I wish you would guess, you are so clever at guessing."

"There is no need for me to guess; I dare say Uncle Wilton would tell you in a minute if you asked him, because you are his favourite," said Rose, with ill-natured emphasis.

"O, Rose, how unkind you are," said Margaret, turning away.

"It was a fortunate thing for you that I was sent to bed yesterday," continued Rose, in the same bitter tone; "of course you told him how naughty I had been."

"I never said a word about it," returned Margaret warmly. "I could hardly speak for crying, and he was too good-natured to ask me any questions."

"Very good-natured, no doubt," returned Rose, with a sneer; "and very nice it will be to go and live with him in that pretty little cottage we talk so much about."

"Rose, how unhappy you make me!" said Margaret, bursting into tears. "Aunt Tatchet told me last night she was quite sure Captain Wilton meant to choose you."

"Ah, but I know better than Aunt Tatchet," said Rose, scornfully; "and what a baby you are, Margaret, to cry at every thing."

"Why, what's all this about?" said the Captain, coming up abruptly. "Margaret in tears, and Rose looking as fierce as a tiger. I do believe you little girls have been quarreling."

"Margaret is trying to make you love her the best, Uncle," said Rose, sullenly.

"You are really a very naughty, jealous girl," said the Captain, with a glow of honest indignation; "and if you go on as you have begun, there is no doubt but I shall love Margaret the best."

At this reproof, Rose slunk away, and was glad to seek the shelter of her own room, when she sat down and indulged in a hearty cry. The disgrace of yesterday, the disappointment of not being the first to welcome her uncle,

his liking for Margaret, and the prospect of passing her life with Aunt Tatchet, weighed upon her mind and made her completely miserable. Her face even was changed, and no longer wore the happy good-tempered smile that rendered it so charming. An anxious look contracted her forehead, and the indulgence of jealous feelings gave an unpleasant expression to her pretty blue eyes and her rosy mouth. One thought alone comforted her.

"I can know in a minute what my Uncle's wonderful surprise is going to be," said she to herself. "Suppose I were to ask the dove—there can be no harm in that; only I must learn to be more careful, and keep it quite a secret." With this resolution, she stole again to the lumber-room, and going softly up to the cage, "Come here, my pretty birdie," said she; "your mistress wants you to tell her another secret—be sure you speak the truth—what is my Uncle's treat going to be?"

"A magic lantern," replied the dove, quickly.

"A magic lantern! O how delighted I am! I have never seen one in my life," cried Rose, forgetting her troubles in a moment. "Dear good dove, I will give you a lump of sugar for telling me such charming news! A magic lantern! I can hardly believe it," and Rose skipped back to her room, gay as a lark. Her first impulse was to run and tell Margaret, but the necessity of caution held her back. "I should not like to get into another scrape," said she, laughing, "and perhaps lose the chance of seeing it. O I will be so careful, not a single syllable shall escape!" and she screwed up her mouth as tight as possible.

The discovery of the magic lantern gave a new and happy turn to Rose's thoughts. Her brow cleared, her eyes sparkled, and she ran down stairs, merry and good humoured as ever. She found Aunt Tatchet in the drawing-room, busily employed folding up a number of three-cornered notes.

"O, Rose, what do you think?" cried Margaret, who was leaning her elbows on the table, and watching the proceedings with great interest. "We are going to have a party to-night to see Uncle's wonderful secret. I should so like to know what it is."

"What? the magic—— O so should I above all things," said Rose, correcting herself in a moment, and turning as red as scarlet.

"Uncle was a very long time unpacking it before he went out," said Margaret; "and nobody is to go into the room on any account."

"How puzzled you seem, Margaret," said Rose, laughing. "Now be sure you don't peep."

"Peep! Why she would never do anything so mean, that I will answer for her," interrupted Frank, who was lighting the taper for his aunt to seal her notes.

"O but, Frank, to see a magic lan—— I mean, I don't suppose Margaret would peep any more than I should," stammered Rose, blushing deeply. "Uncle would be so very angry."

"How funny you do look, Rose!" said Frank; "any one might think you had been peeping yourself."

"I wonder what you will say next?" said Rose, highly affronted.

"Well, never mind, Rosy dear," said Frank, good-humouredly; "I am sure I won't tell, for I hate getting people into scrapes; but you might just give me a hint of what it is like," whispered he, coming close to his sister.

"I—I—I tell you I have not seen it, any more than you have," replied Rose, distracted between her dread of not speaking the truth, and her fear of revealing the secret.

"Come, Rose, do be good-natured," persisted Frank, following her close up; "I am certain you know all about it by looking in your face. Do just whisper how big it is, and what it is like; you know I won't tell."

"O, Aunt Tatchet, I wish you would speak to Frank; he is teasing me so!" cried Rose, peevishly; "he says I have been peeping, and I am sure I have not."

"I don't know what you are talking about, Rose," said Miss Tatchet, gathering up the notes in her hand. "Frank is always teasing somebody, so you must make up your mind to bear it."

"I have found it out! I have found it out!" cried Frank, capering round the room as soon as Miss Tatchet and Margaret had quitted it; "and now what will you give me for not telling?"

"What nonsense, Frank!" returned Rose, in a tone of real alarm; "how can you have found it out, when I am certain I never told you."

"Told me? No: but you half said it twice over, 'Magic,

magic, magic lantern,' there now!" and he began to dance his favourite hornpipe with redoubled energy.

Rose now felt she had involved herself in a terrible scrape.

"O how unlucky I am! What will become of me?" cried she, bursting into tears.

"Pray don't cry about it, Rose," said Frank, "there is no great harm done, though I must say peeping is not exactly honourable to my way of thinking."

"But, Frank, I am ruined for ever now; Uncle will never forgive me this."

"Be comforted, Rose; Uncle is gone to Mr. Elton's to dinner," said Frank, who was heartily sorry for his sister's distress.

"But you will tell him when he comes home, I know you will," said Rose, sobbing bitterly.

"I hope I may never see a magic lantern in my life if I do," said Frank, in a mortified tone. "What an ill-natured fellow you think me!"

"Don't be angry, Frank, pray don't," said Rose, hastily; "nothing is so easy as to let it out by mistake, as I have done."

"You need not be afraid; it is all safe and sealed," cried Frank, putting his finger on his lip. "But, Rose, I wish you had not looked."

"I did not look, I am sure I did not," said Rose confidently, but changing colour as she spoke.

"Well, well, Rose, don't tell a story about it; you must have looked, or else how could you have found it out?"

"But you won't get me into disgrace, dear good Frank; promise me that you won't, and I shall be quite happy," said Rose, clasping her hands.

"O yes, I dare say," said Frank, gaily; "generally I am tiresome Frank, good-for-nothing Frank, that plague Frank. Ah! well, things are altered now. But don't cry Rose, your secret is safe with me; I shall not utter a word."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAGIC LANTERN.

A CHILD's party at Christmas! Who cannot call to mind a thousand delightful associations at the very name? Of some happy fireside where the huge logs crackle on the hearth—of merry little faces all eager for play—of the never-ending delights of blindman's buff, snap-dragon, and hunt the slipper—of country dances and charades—of mince-pies and custards—of aunts, uncles, and even grandmamas joining in the sport, and for one night at least becoming children with the rest? These were some of the joys anticipated by Rose and Margaret Wilton on the day their uncle purposed to exhibit his famous magic lantern. But never had the intervening hours appeared so long and so wearisome. Frank, with the secret of the magic lantern on his mind, was thoroughly miserable. Not daring to stay within doors, lest by some unlucky chance he might betray his sister, he took himself off to the pond, and spent the whole morning in sliding, skating, and a variety of gymnastic exercises. At length, he was called in to dinner, and it would have been difficult to say whether he or Rose kept their lips screwed up the tightest.

After dinner there were yet three good hours until Captain Wilton's return and the arrival of the little visitors. Frank could not slide any more that day, so he fidgetted in and out of the room, now whispering to Rose, now drumming with his fingers on the table, now scrawling the word "magic-lantern" all over his slate to relieve his mind, and then rubbing it out in a terrible hurry, lest Aunt Tatchet should ask what he was doing. Finally, to everybody's great joy, he scampered away to watch Barbara take the plum-cake out of the oven.

Poor Rose had been quite as uncomfortable as her brother, and, in spite of all her caution, had many a narrow escape of letting the fatal word pop out by mistake. Fortunately, she contrived to save herself in time, and a few blushes and a little stammering were all that could be noticed. At last, six o'clock struck, and a rat-tat-tat at the door announced that Captain Wilton had returned.

"I need not be afraid of anything now," thought Rose, as she flew along the passage. "What a happy evening this will be!" But, alas! one unlucky moment ruined all. She caught sight of Barbara in the very act of opening the breakfast-room door.

"O, Barbara, what are you going to do?" cried Rose, in alarm. "No one may go in there, not even Aunt Tatchet."

"Not go in!" cried Barbara, taking her hand suddenly from the lock: "and what's that for I wonder?"

"Because the magic lantern is there—Uncle's magic lantern that he wants to surprise us with," replied Rose, quickly, and totally forgetting her caution.

"A magic lantern, Miss Rose! I never heard tell of such a thing," said Barbara in a tone of curiosity.

"O Barbara, I should not have said a word about it!" cried Rose; "Uncle will be so angry if he knows I have found it out."

"What! you've been peeping, have you?" said Barbara. "O fie, Miss Rose; that ain't a young lady's trick however."

"I have not been peeping. I wonder you dare say that I have," replied Rose, vehemently.

"Well, well, don't put yourself about," said Barbara; "I've peeped myself afore now. Why, bless you, how else are folks to find things out?"

"But you must not tell of me, Barbara," cried Rose, "or I shall not be allowed to see it at all."

"No, indeed, I'll none get you into a scrape," said Barbara, good-humouredly. "But is the magic lantern, as you call it, in here?" asked she, lowering her voice.

"Yes, Barbara; and we are only waiting for everybody to come to have it exhibited."

"Bless me, how I should love to see it!" cried Barbara; "it ain't like other lanterns, is it, Miss Rose?"

"O dear no," said Rose, laughing. "I will ask Uncle if you may come in. But do pray, Barbara, keep my secret, or I shall be sent to bed as I was yesterday, and only think how dreadful that would be."

"Never do you fear, Miss Rose; run along to your Uncle there in the drawing-room—he'll be a wondering what's become of you. I'll be flogged if I don't get a peep myself somehow or other," continued Barbara, as the

little girl disappeared at the end of the passage. "Like mistress like maid, so here goes—" and kneeling down, she applied her eye to the keyhole.

But unfortunately, Miss Tatchet had stuffed the keyhole with cotton wool, to keep the draft out, and Barbara found her design frustrated in the very beginning. There was nothing for it but to open the door, and she stood a few minutes listening with her hand upon the lock. All was quiet; and taking courage, she turned the latch and pushed the door gently open, as though afraid something would jump out upon her. Nothing was visible but a white cloth stretched along one side of the room, and a box, full of slides, that stood upon the floor with its lid half off. Barbara was sadly disappointed that no more was to be seen, and setting down her candle, she began to turn over the slides, and hold them up to the light. The first she drew out delighted her extremely. It was the picture of an elephant painted upon glass, and had gold and silver trappings, and a howdah on its back. Then came an Indian juggler throwing balls and knives into the air; lions, tigers, monkeys, birds of Paradise, and peacocks with their tails wide spread, followed in succession, nor was Barbara content until she had drawn out the very last slide the box contained. At this moment, a bell rang sharp and loud.

"Bless me," cried she, starting up, "that's missis, I declare. Well, what a treat I've had—it's as good as a wild beast show;" and she began to put the slides back again as quickly as she could.

Rat-tat-tat at the front-door, and ring, ring, ring from

Miss Tatchet in the drawing-room. Not a minute was to be lost, and Barbara, dreading lest her mistress should come to look for her, scrambled away, leaving everything in the greatest confusion.

Meanwhile, Rose, all unconscious of the danger that awaited her, was the merriest of the merry. The little visitors dropped in one by one, until the whole party had assembled, and Captain Wilton's secret was talked about, and wondered at, and made the sole topic of conversation. Even Aunt Tatchet seemed to take an interest in the matter, and as she chatted and smiled from her easy chair by the fire, the children thought they had never seen her look so good-natured. As soon as the tea-things and plum-cake disappeared, the little visitors formed themselves into groups, and "I wonder what it can be"—"Don't you hope it will soon commence?"—"How very long he is"—was whispered by first one and then another, and many an expressive glance was directed to Captain Wilton, who stood quietly gossiping with Aunt Tatchet. At length, to their great delight, the gossip was ended, and Captain Wilton slipped out of the room. Rose actually danced for joy.

"Now we shall see the——" She stopped short, stammered a few incoherent words, and tried to creep into a corner to hide her confusion.

"See the what? O do tell us. Rose knows all about it," said the children, crowding round her; "see how guilty she looks, she must have been peeping!" said a few of the elder ones, hemming her in.

"I have not been peeping, and I don't look guilty, I am

sure!" said Rose, too late remembering her caution, and blushing deeper and deeper.

At this moment Captain Wilton re-entered the room, with a very grave face, and more severe than the children could have supposed possible.

"Where is Frank, and where are my two little nieces?" said he.

"Here, Uncle!" cried Frank and Margaret, stepping forward with alacrity.

"Here, Uncle!" said Rose timidly, and crouching down in her corner.

The Captain detected her blushes and her embarrassment in an instant.

"Come here, Rose," said he; "if you have done nothing wrong, you need not be afraid. Do you know what I was going to show you yonder?"

Rose made no reply, but kept her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"You have been into the breakfast-room to look," said the Captain, highly displeased.

"O no, Uncle, I am certain I have not," said Rose, firmly.

"But you know what it is very well," returned the Captain. "Come, speak up."

"A magic lantern," faltered Rose, and heartily wishing she had never seen either the old woman or her talking bird.

"I knew she had been peeping," whispered one of the children; "she looked so guilty when we asked her."

"You naughty child," said the Captain, "how could

you think of taking the slides out of the box, and scattering them on the floor? Of course, I set my foot on one, and broke it."

"It was not I who did it, Uncle," cried Rose; "I am sure I never meddled with the slides."

"Don't add to the fault of disobedience that of lying," said the Captain, sternly. "How else came you to know?"

Rose was again silent, and became scarlet with blushes, while Frank, dreading lest his Uncle should appeal to him, made a move towards the door, intending to take himself out of the way. The Captain's quick eye noticed his alarm.

"You seem to have something on your mind, Frank," said he. "Pray have you been peeping as well as your sister?"

"No, indeed, Uncle, I should scorn to do anything so mean," replied Frank, turning round and looking boldly into his uncle's face.

"But you know all about it evidently," said the Captain. "Pray did Rose tell you what she had done?"

Poor Frank was now at his wit's-end. He stood rooted to the ground, passed his hand through his hair, pulled down his waistcoat, opened and shut his mouth without uttering a sound, and finally, stared at his uncle as though he were a ghost. Captain Wilton could not forbear a smile.

"Speak out, my boy," said he, kindly.

"I cannot tell a story, Uncle," stammered Frank; "but do forgive Rose, I am sure she did not mean—that is—I wish, Uncle, you would excuse my saying anything at all."

"There is no need to say a word more," said the Captain;

"your manner fully confirms my suspicions. Had you openly confessed your fault," continued he, addressing himself to Rose, "I might have treated it as an act of childish curiosity, and passed it over with a reproof. As it is, however, you have forfeited all right to the treat prepared for you; and I must banish you to your own room for the remainder of the day."

Rose felt that appearances were sadly against her, and the more strongly she protested her innocence, the more angry her uncle became. Indeed, everybody in the room seemed inclined to fix upon her as the culprit. She at last gave up the point in despair, and went slowly up stairs, sobbing and crying, to spend the evening with no better entertainment than her own reflections.

"How I wish I had followed Margaret's advice, and let the dove fly away," thought she, as she sat listening to the bursts of laughter, and exclamations of delight that occasionally reached her. "She is much happier than I am, because she knows nothing of what is coming. O, why did I ask? Uncle will never love me again; how miserable I am!" and covering her face with her hands, she sobbed aloud.

Frank's pleasure, too, was sadly spoilt by the talking bird. To be sure the magic lantern was so enchanting that he could not help sometimes forgetting Rose's disgrace. But then, again, the remembrance of it would come into his mind and make him perfectly wretched. As soon as ever the exhibition was ended, he crept up stairs to console her.

"O, Rose," said he, "how I hate to think of your being

shut up here while we are enjoying ourselves. But don't fret so. I have famous news for you."

"Have you, Frank? O, do tell me what it is?" cried Rose, looking up.

"Why Uncle Wilton, who is the very best uncle that ever lived, has brought some such beautiful presents home with him from India. I don't know what they are; but he is going to give them to us to-morrow."

"O, Frank, how nice! I do so love having presents!" exclaimed Rose, smiling through her tears; "but I wonder what they are—mine is, I mean; and whether it will be as pretty as Margaret's," added she, the old feeling of jealousy reviving at the thought.

"I dare say it will be the prettiest of the three, because you are the eldest," said Frank, in a soothing tone. "I think Uncle Wilton seems determined to make us like him, don't you, Rose?"

"Ah, but he loves Margaret the best!" said Rose, the tears again starting to her eyes.

"Never mind, Rose, Margaret deserves to be loved a very great deal," replied Frank, warmly; "besides, you have been in disgrace ever since he came, so he has not had much chance of liking you."

"Yes, it is all the fault of that nasty, tiresome, ugly——"

"O, no, not ugly," interrupted Frank. "The magic lantern is the most beautiful thing I ever saw. But we won't talk about that now, Rose. Do you know we are going to a party at Mr. Elton's to-morrow night?"

"O, I am so glad," cried Rose, joyfully, "we always have

such capital fun there, don't we, Frank? What a happy day to-morrow will be!" and Rose's face brightened up at the prospect.

Frank was now called down to a game at blind man's buff, and Rose, left once more alone, sat thinking over the good news he had just told her.

"I can know in a minute what my present will be, by asking the dove," said she; "it always tells me the truth." But the remembrance of past disasters was fresh in her mind, and instead of jumping up with her usual alacrity, she sat a long time undecided what she should do.

"Well I will ask it just this one question," said she, stealing towards the door, "and if it gets me into another scrape, why then I really will let it go."

The dove was hopping merrily in its cage; but the instant it caught sight of its mistress it crouched down in its nest as though afraid she was come to punish it for having brought her into disgrace.

"Don't be frightened, my little dove," said Rose, caressingly, "I shall not hurt you. Come here, and tell me what is my Uncle's present going to be?"

"A gold watch," said the dove, hopping again upon its perch.

"What do you say?" cried Rose, scarcely believing she could have heard aright.

"A gold watch," repeated the dove, winking cunningly with its sharp black eyes.

"Well, this is better than anything you have told me yet!" exclaimed Rose, utterly bewildered with joy. "A

watch! a real watch, that goes like Aunt Tatchet's! how very grand! But I must not tell Frank or Margaret either," added she. "No, no, that would never do; I am wiser now, and don't choose to be punished any more. It is so disagreeable to be shut up in my own room, just because I know what is going to happen."

So saying, she screwed up her mouth, and ran back to spend the remainder of the evening in thinking over her good fortune, and wishing the morrow was come.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLD WATCH.

ROSE's extraordinary behaviour about the magic lantern had caused her uncle the deepest anxiety. He could scarcely believe it possible that a child of her tender age could be capable of such deceit, and all the hopes he entertained of adopting her as his daughter were at an end.

"I shall not be a loser by that," thought he, "for Margaret seems to have by far the sweetest disposition; but Rose cannot be suffered to grow up with that terrible habit of lying," and he passed a sleepless night, devising one plan after another for her reformation.

The next morning, however, Rose came down all smiles and good humour, and seemed to have quite forgotten her disgrace. She laughed and talked, and was so full of childish glee, that Captain Wilton could not find it in his heart to remind her of her misconduct, and for a time, things went on as smoothly as could be desired. It is true, the thought of the watch was uppermost in Rose's mind; but she had learnt a lesson of caution by past experience, and not an imprudent word or look escaped her. Dinner passed

over, and still she was safe, and it wanted now but a few minutes to the time when her uncle's beautiful present was to be her own.

"I am fortunate for once," said she, as she ran up stairs to fetch Aunt Tatchet's spectacles, "and not any the worse for knowing what is going to happen."

Alas, poor Rose! a danger she little expected was at hand. Barbara, whose conscience had been reproaching her, all the morning, for having involved the little girl in the scrape of the magic lantern, was lying in wait for her, to make a rude kind of apology, or some sort of amends.

"O, Miss Rose," said she, coming suddenly in, as the child was looking about for her aunt's spectacles. "O, Miss Rose, that magic lantern was an unlucky business, wasn't it?"

"It was, indeed, Barbara," replied Rose; "but it is over now, and I don't so much mind about it."

"That's right, Miss Rose," said Barbara, thinking after all she had no need to confess her own share in the matter. "I dare say the Captain will shew it again, some of these days."

"No, I don't think he will do that," said Rose; "but he is going to give me a gold watch," added she, letting the words slip out in the joy of her heart.

"Well, I never!" said Barbara, setting her arms a kimbo; "you will be a fine lady then. Why, its enough to make you go wild!"

"Dear me, how silly I have been to tell her!" thought Rose, feeling again on the very brink of danger.

"And pray, is Miss Margaret a going to have a watch too?" asked Barbara, who did not observe the little girl's frightened looks.

"Margaret and Frank will both have presents," replied Rose; "but I don't know what they will be. I have not even seen the watch."

"But I have, now I come to think about it," said Barbara, abruptly; "stay a minute, Miss Rose, I'll be back in no time."

So saying, she left the room, and Rose, to her unspeakable alarm, heard her stump along the passage to Captain Wilton's apartment.

"What can Barbara be going to do I wonder," thought she; "surely she won't meddle with anything. How foolish of me to tell just the last minute!"

Rose had hardly time even for these hurried reflections, before stump, stump, and back came Barbara.

"Here it is, Miss Rose," said she, holding out a little box; "it was lying on his dressing-table this morning, so I made bold to see what it was. Don't be frightened, it won't bite you."

"O, Barbara, pray take it away," cried Rose, in terrible agitation; "we are sure to be caught; how could you be so silly?"

"Silly, Miss Rose? I'd only a mind to please you a little," said Barbara, in a disappointed tone.

"But, Barbara, you must carry it back as soon as ever——O how beautiful!" cried Rose, cautiously raising the lid of the box, and forgetting all her fears in an instant.

"Only look, Barbara, it is more beautiful than Aunt Tatchet's! O, how kind Uncle Wilton is! and it ticks, actually it ticks!" added she, taking it out and holding it to her ear; "I can hardly believe it is for me."

"Why, Rose, what a time you have been finding my spectacles," said Miss Tatchet, suddenly opening the door and walking into the room; "what have you been doing?"

"Here are your spectacles, Aunt," said Rose, who had barely time to save herself by slipping the watch into her pocket. "I was just coming."

"Coming, indeed!" said Miss Tatchet, peevishly; "your Uncle is waiting to speak to you."

"To me, Aunt?" said Rose, starting and turning pale.

"Yes; he has something to say to you before he gives you the presents," replied Miss Tatchet; "but you need not run away in such a hurry," added she, as Rose flew to the door; "I want you to carry my work-basket for me."

Poor Rose would have given the world to dart into her Uncle's room and get rid of the fatal watch, that seemed already to be burning a hole in her pocket. But not a moment was allowed her, and she was obliged to carry down the work-basket, closely followed by her Aunt.

Captain Wilton was standing, as usual, with his back to the fire.

"My dear child," said he, "I don't wish to speak of old grievances, and I think the loss of the magic lantern has been a sufficient punishment for yesterday's fault. I have brought some presents from India, which I hope will please you all very much. But yours can only be given, on con-

dition that you promise for the future, to speak the truth without equivocation or reserve."

During this speech Rose's ideas were in the greatest confusion. The dread of her uncle's anger when he should miss the watch, and the agony lest he might even hear it tick in her pocket, deprived her of the power of utterance; and holding down her head, she muttered some scarcely articulate sounds.

"Look up, Rose, and answer me," said the Captain, puzzled more than ever by her embarrassment, "will you promise me always to speak the truth?"

"Yes, Uncle, I will," stammered Rose, trying to look her Uncle in the face, but quite unable to do it, and again hanging her head.

"You are an extraordinary child," said the Captain; "I really don't know what to make of you," and after standing a few moments, apparently lost in thought, he quitted the room.

No sooner had he closed the door, than Rose felt as if a load were taken off her heart, and she resolved instantly to carry the watch into her own room, and hide it there, in some secret corner, until the search for it should be over. But Aunt Tatchet, at that very moment, called her to hold a skein of silk, and Rose was deprived of the only means of getting out of her dilemma. She slowly moved towards her Aunt, and with a very ill grace took the skein of silk in her hands. Miss Tatchet could not help noticing her unwillingness to oblige, for she paid no attention to what she was doing, and was entirely occupied with thinking how she could escape her Uncle's displeasure.

And now Captain Wilton's footstep was heard, and Rose gave such a start, that the end of silk her Aunt had found with some difficulty, was snatched from her hand, and lost in an instant.

"Dear, dear, Rose, only see what you have done!" said Miss Tatchet, who was almost in despair; "you are the most troublesome girl I ever knew!"

"I am sorry to hear such a bad account of you, Rose," said her Uncle, who entered just in time to hear the last words.

"She has unravelled the silk, and lost the end, and seems not to know what she is about," continued Miss Tatchet. "I suppose she is thinking of the present, and that makes her so naughty."

"It may happen that there is no present for her," said the Captain, gravely, and fixing upon Rose a penetrating glance.

Rose turned pale as ashes, and trembled in every limb.

"Did you know what I was intending to give you, Rose?" continued he, more than ever convinced of her guilt.

Rose did not at first make any reply, but on her Uncle repeating the question, she stammered out—

"A gold watch."

"I suspected as much," said the Captain, in a severe tone; "and perhaps you know too, where this watch is to be found."

"What, has she taken it away?" cried Miss Tatchet, dropping her silk in astonishment.

"It lay upon my dressing-table a few minutes ago, and

now it is gone," returned the Captain. "Some one must have taken it, and Rose's whole manner points her out as the culprit."

"Surely, Rose, you would not be so naughty as to meddle with your Uncle's beautiful presents that he has been so kind as to bring you!" said Miss Tatchet, greatly distressed at this fresh instance of the child's duplicity.

Poor Rose felt it was quite impossible to clear herself. Tears of shame and vexation began to stream down her face, and almost unconsciously she put her hand into her pocket for her handkerchief. This unlucky movement was fatal, for in her confusion she drew out, not only the handkerchief, but the gold watch itself, which dropped upon the floor, exactly at Captain Wilton's feet.

"Well, this is more than I could have believed!" cried Miss Tatchet, holding up her hands; "to have it all the time in her pocket! O fie, Rose, for shame, for shame!"

"For shame, indeed!" said Captain Wilton, picking up the watch. "Upon my word, Miss Tatchet, I am quite at a loss to know what to do with Rose; she seems to me a thorough little liar."

"I did not take it away, uncle, I am sure I did not," said Rose, sobbing violently.

"Don't attempt to vindicate yourself, Rose," said the Captain, angrily, "you will only get into deeper disgrace; and I cannot believe one word you say."

"She must go back to her own room, again, I suppose," said Miss Tatchet, "for I shall not think of taking her to Mr. Elton's party."

Frank and Margaret were horror-struck at Rose's conduct, and felt it was hopeless to say anything in her behalf. But so grieved were they at her distress, that not even the remaining presents, a ship for Frank, and a coral necklace for Margaret, could win a smile for their uncle in return. Indeed, a gloom appeared to have come over the whole party, when Barbara put in her head, and announced the carriage was at the door. Frank and Margaret were hurried off in tears, and feeling as if all the pleasure of the evening was gone, while Rose, sobbing and crying, again mounted the stairs to her own room.

Alas! poor child, what a weight of sorrow lay upon her heart. The shadows of the future, like strange and terrible phantoms, were gathering thickly round her. She had dared to lift the mysterious veil, stretched before us by the hand of mercy, and the danger that would otherwise have remained unknown, was pressing forward to meet and overwhelm her!

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOODEN SHED.

"TO-MORROW morning, the very first thing, I will let the dove fly," said Rose, as she laid her head upon the pillow, after her supper of milk and bread. "If I had never kept that little tiresome thing, how happy I should have been! I should have seen the magic lantern, have had the gold watch, and now be at Mr. Elton's party. Ah! Margaret has had all the pleasure, and I have had all the punishment." And she eagerly longed for day-light to appear, that she might get rid of the talking bird, and once more be innocent and happy.

"Rose," said Margaret, coming to the bedside, on her return from the party, "do you know, something is going to happen—I mean, besides the presents, and besides the magic lantern. Uncle whispered it in my ear as we came home. Just guess, and see if you cannot find it out?"

"I wish you would take the candle away, and let me alone, it hurts my eyes," said Rose peevishly, and turning away her head.

"I did not mean to disturb you, Rose," said Margaret, gently; "I only thought it would cheer you a little to hear my good news." Then closing the curtains, she withdrew, and was very soon in her own little bed, and fast asleep.

"What can be going to happen now?" thought Rose, leaning on her elbow, and musing over Margaret's piece of intelligence. "I have a great mind:— but then, I mean to let it fly to-morrow. Ah! how many scrapes it has got me into already. No, no, I will not ask it one single question more;" and she lay down again, and tried to settle herself to sleep. But it would not do.

"What can be going to happen!" thought she, feeling more wakeful than ever. "I could know in a minute, if I liked. Suppose I were, just this once—I will never ask it again, and to-morrow morning, nothing shall prevent me letting it go."

She then crept out of bed, lighted the candle by the embers in the grate, and began hastily to dress. She went along the passage without making any noise, and found the dove quietly roosting, with its head under its wing.

"Come, waken up, my pet," whispered Rose, "I want to talk to you a little." But the dove vouchsafed no reply, nor moved so much as a feather.

"Come, come," said Rose, putting her fingers between the bars, "I shall not sleep a wink, unless you tell me what is going to happen."

"Fire, fire, fire!" said the dove, rousing itself into a state of violent excitement; "the house will be on fire!"

For a moment, Rose stood as if paralyzed, and a quick feeling of danger thrilled through her from head to foot. She darted back to her own room, and half expected to see the flames shoot up on every side. But no flames were to be seen. All was tranquillity and repose; and Margaret's face upon the pillow, wore a peaceful expression, at variance with even a thought of danger.

Her first impulse was to waken her sister. "But it will take so long to explain," said she to herself. "Suppose I were to run down, and tell Uncle Wilton and Aunt Tatchet. What a good thing it is they are not gone to bed, and how glad I am I found it out in time!"

So saying, she flew to the drawing-room, where Captain Wilton and Miss Tatchet sat chatting cosily together, with their feet on the fender.

"O Captain Wilton!" cried she, opening the door, and totally forgetting Aunt Tatchet's nerves, "do you know, the house is going to be on fire?"

At this sudden address, and the apparition of Rose, her cheeks pale as ashes, Captain Wilton started from his chair. "Why child, I thought you were in bed, and asleep an hour ago," said he, taking hold of her, to convince himself she was a real substantial being. "What are you talking about?"

"She is walking in her sleep, I dare say," cried Miss Tatchet, "and I am frightened to death at people who walk in their sleep. O pray Captain Wilton, take her up stairs again! Only see how wild she looks!"

"I am not asleep, Aunt," cried Rose, disengaging herself from the captain. "I am as wide awake as you are. But

the house will be on fire, unless we do something to prevent it."

"Is there a smell of burn anywhere?" asked the captain, opening the door, and putting out his head.

"Now, pray captain, don't you terrify me," said Miss Tatchet, beginning to shake and shiver; "what I should do if there was a fire, I cannot imagine—I must be burnt to death."

"O Captain Wilton, do let us sit up and watch for the fire to begin!" cried Rose, "we could surely stop it before it came to a blaze."

"My dear child," said the captain, "I wish I could convince myself, you were neither dreaming nor crazy. However, if it will set your mind at rest, we will go over the house together, from the top to the bottom, to see that all is safe."

"Thank you, Uncle," cried Rose, eagerly taking his hand; "but even then I shall be afraid of going to bed, for the house must be on fire. I know it must," added she emphatically, as they went along the hall.

All was safe, and dark enough to satisfy the most timorous. Not a gleam of light either in kitchen or parlour. Every room was opened, but without discovering a single cause of fear; and Barbara's loud and continued snore was the only sound heard.

"Well, now you are satisfied, I hope," said the captain, as they returned once more to the drawing-room.

"Satisfied or not, I insist on your going to bed," said

Miss Tatchet sharply; "you have quite spoilt the pleasant chat I was having with your uncle."

Nothing remained for poor Rose, but to do as her aunt desired; still, she could not help clinging to Captain Wilton's hand, as though unwilling to let him go.

"Now then, run along," said Miss Tatchet impatiently; "and for pity's sake, don't let me see anything more of you until to-morrow morning."

"What shall I do!" said Rose, sitting down in despair by the side of the bed. "A child like me cannot put out the fire, that is quite certain," and she shuddered at the coming danger. "But I might save a few things," added she, starting up, and opening a chest of drawers that stood opposite; "our best frocks, for instance," and she drew them out and laid them on the floor. Then some necklaces, and other articles of finery; and presently, some favourite playthings, and a few well-read story-books were added. The heap really began to look formidable, and Rose stood a long time considering where to bestow her treasures. The only place she could think of was an old shed close to the kitchen door, and connected with the house by a row of wooden palings. In warm weather, the children were accustomed to carry their little chairs into this shed, and dignify it by the name of summer-house. Now, however, it was forlorn enough, and contained nothing but a bundle of hay, that had been brought in and thrown carelessly down in a corner. Here Rose determined to hide her treasures, and when the fire was over, enjoy the fruits of

her ingenuity, and bring them all out again safe and sound.

But Aunt Tatchet and Captain Wilton had not yet finished their chat, and she dared not begin to move about, lest they should hear her, and come to see what she was doing. Many and many a time, did she run to the landing to listen; and her patience was almost exhausted before they came up stairs. Even then, she had to wait until she supposed the whole household would be asleep, before she ventured to sally forth.

At last, when all was quiet, she took up as many playthings as her pinafore would hold, and with the candle in her hand, crept out of doors to the wooden shed. When she had hidden these, she ran back again for more; and as she could only carry a few things at once, she had to paddle backwards and forwards a great many times. The ground was white with snow, and her hands and feet ached with cold, as she carefully secreted the last of her treasures amongst the hay.

“If it had not been for me and my talking bird,” said she, as she stood with the candle in her hand, looking at the heap of things, she had so well concealed, “every one of these must have been burnt. How glad Aunt Tatchet will be when she finds they are safe!”

But Rose’s task was not yet ended.

“I dare not go to bed,” said she, “for who else is there to watch? Everybody is asleep; even the dove has its head under its wing, and the house must be on fire!”

The only thing she could do was to keep awake all night, in order to give the alarm, and wrapping herself in a shawl, she sat down, expecting every moment, the fire to begin. But alas ! the poor child was wearied out with her exertions, and do what she would, a heavy feeling of drowsiness stole over her. She tried to rouse herself ; she walked about the room, and counted the ticking of the clock. It was to no purpose. A thick cloud gathered round her. The candle began to dance before her eyes, and the chairs and tables looked upside down. Aunt Tatchet, her Uncle Wilton, the tiny old woman, and the boys upon the pond, seemed to crowd about her in confusion. Her head fell back, her hands dropped by her side. Another moment, and Rose was asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ FIRE ! FIRE ! FIRE ! ”

THE clock in the old church tower had just struck midnight, and the moon, rising from behind a cloud, shone out so clear and bright, you might have seen Aunt Tatchet's house, the garden round it, and even Rose's footprints in the snow. There was a deep stillness in the air. The villagers had long ago sunk to rest, and not a single light glimmered either from hall or cottage. Rose, too, the careful little watcher, was asleep, and forgetful of the threatened danger, was dreaming of the tiny old woman, with her sharp black eyes, of Uncle Wilton, and his pretty rural cottage, with the paddock before it, and the ducks and geese swimming in the pond.

But though Aunt Tatchet's great old house looked now in such repose, the prophecy of the talking bird was speedily to be fulfilled. A spark dropped from Rose's candle had fallen into the hay, and this spark was to occasion, all the mischief, she had been so anxious to avert.

Ere long, a ruddy light appeared within the shed. It

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was reflected on the snow, and there was a crackling sound, as Rose's hoard of treasures, her dolls, her necklaces, and her story books, were all on fire. Up! up! mounted the flames, spreading themselves rapidly on every side, and the shed was soon a heap of ashes.

For a moment, the fire sank as though exhausted. But look! it is creeping stealthily along the wooden palings to the house. There is no Rose to peep with anxious face, and give the alarm; so on it goes, wreathing itself around the old branches of clematis, that hang so prettily about the porch in summer. These are burnt up in an instant, and gathering strength, the fire lays hold upon the woodwork of the house. Up! up! mount the flames, roaring, and crackling, and reddening the very heavens with their glare!

Some men upon the road see the light, and think at first it is the redness of the morning. As they come nearer, they discover their mistake. It can be nothing but a fire; and they give the alarm, "fire! fire! fire!"

The house is on fire! and the black dove shut up within its cage, beats its little wings against the bars, and vainly tries to escape. No one knows that it is there. Frank and Margaret both think that Rose has let it go. But the fire steadily approaches the place where it is concealed. It cannot break through the wires of its prison. It utters piercing cries, and its black feathers strew the bottom of the cage. All its efforts are in vain, no help is near, and the talking bird must perish in the fire.

"It is time to get up, Margaret," said Rose, starting up from her sleep, "see how light it is!"

"And what a dreadful noise!" exclaimed Margaret, getting quickly out of bed; "and what a strange light upon the window! And do you hear, they are crying 'fire!' " added she, turning pale with terror.

In a moment the recollections of the past night flashed upon Rose's mind. "The house is on fire! The house is on fire!" screamed she, snatching aside the curtain. "Why did not Captain Wilton believe me, when I told him what was going to happen?"

"Rose, pray don't scream so, or you will frighten me to death!" cried Margaret, trembling in every limb. "Do let us run to Aunt Tatchet."

And now the noise and shouting outside became almost deafening. The whole neighbourhood was alarmed. Cries of "fire! fire! fire!" had roused the cottagers from their slumbers; and in a few minutes, Aunt Tatchet's garden, so prettily and trimly kept, was trampled down by the crowd, and became a scene of the wildest confusion.

In the house itself, the greatest terror prevailed. Miss Tatchet wrung her hands, and gave herself up for lost, while the two little girls clung to her as if for protection. Poor Barbara lost her presence of mind altogether, and hid herself in a corner, sobbing and crying like a child. But the fire made rapid progress, and Captain Wilton thought it necessary to remove Miss Tatchet and the children from the house. Accordingly, Mr. Elton's carriage was brought, and Miss Tatchet, wrapped in all her shawls, was carried down and placed within it. The two little girls followed close be-

hind. But scarcely had Rose reached the bottom of the stairs, than she remembered all at once her poor dove, its danger, and the utter impossibility of its getting free. She even fancied she could hear its cries, as though it were calling to her for help; and horror-struck at the thought, she forgot her indignation, her desire to be rid of it, and all the trouble and disgrace it had brought upon her.

Quick as lightning she darted back, and flew along the passage to the lumber-room. It was densely filled with smoke, and she could hardly see the cage in which the poor bird was lying, quite stupified, and with its wings stretched out as though it were dead.

"Poor little thing, you may well be frightened," cried Rose, snatching the cage in her hand with a sensation of delight; "but now you are safe, and I can run back in a moment."

She turned quickly to the door; but here what a terrible scene presented itself! The flames, with a roaring noise, had closely followed in her steps. They swept along the passage, they blocked up the entrance, they mounted to the wooden rafters.

On every side was "fire! fire! fire!"

Rose now became fully aware of her danger, and how madly she had risked her life, for the sake of the talking bird. She felt the flames breathe hot and burning into her face, and looked wildly round for some means of escape. She flew to the window, and would have leaped out, but the height made her head grow dizzy. A sudden faintness came over her, and a thick film spread itself before her



eyes. She remembered no more. The burning house, the dove, the crowd, all were blotted out together, and Rose sank into a state of insensibility. For a moment the child was on the very brink of destruction; and when her pale terrified face appeared at the window, a loud cry of terror burst from the crowd.

But succour was at hand. In a few seconds a ladder was brought, and Captain Wilton was by her side. He raised her in his arms; and while the lookers on held their breath in suspense, he reappeared, carrying his poor little niece, safe indeed, but totally unconscious. Nor was the black dove forgotten, for in his hand he held the cage, where the talking bird was lying, stupified with fear.

Rose then was saved! but for many days she remained insensible, and a thousand strange images danced constantly before her. It seemed to her, as if she were compelled to follow the tiny old woman along a rugged path, that grew steeper and more dangerous at every step. Her limbs ached, and she felt ready to die with fatigue; but in vain she begged permission to return. The tiny old woman only shook her fist, and pointed onwards with an angry scowl. They came at last upon a dreary common, and Rose sank down exhausted, and unable to proceed.

All at once there was a rushing sound, and the common was on fire. The flames made directly towards her, and in spite of her fatigue, she fled before them. The talking bird settled on her shoulder. At first she did not heed it, but it grew heavier and heavier, until she could

no longer bear its weight. She turned to push it off, when lo ! it had changed into a monster, with sharp black eyes, a huge beak, and talons like an eagle. Rose screamed and fell to the ground. The flames came nearer and nearer. She felt them scorch her clothes,—there was no escape ! and uttering a loud cry, she awoke.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONCLUSION.

AUNT Tatchet's great old house suffered no inconsiderable damage by the fire. One entire wing, where the lumber-room, the scene of Rose's danger, was situated, was a mere blackened ruin, and most of the outbuildings were destroyed. But the flames were subdued before they could reach further, and fortunately, the rooms occupied by Miss Tatchet and the children were uninjured.

Rose was laid in her own white bed; but a long illness followed, brought upon her by her dangerous knowledge of the future. Miss Tatchet, for the first time in her life, forgot her nerves and her palpitations, and nursed the little invalid with the greatest care and tenderness. She even brought the cage, in which the black dove was hopping merrily as ever, and thinking it would please Rose to see it, hung it up in the window with her own hands. She was also noticed to take from her pocket the memorandum book, where Frank's past misdemeanors were recorded, and put it secretly into the fire, stirring it about until every atom was consumed.

Rose at length, began to get better, and grew stronger

and stronger every day. First she sat up one hour, then two, and in a few weeks she was able to come down into the drawing-room.

Many events had happened during her illness. Frank had been sent to school, and Captain Wilton had taken possession of his pretty little cottage, and established Margaret there, in her important office of housekeeper. The loss of her sister was a sad trial to Rose, and she shed many tears at the remembrance of her unkind and jealous conduct. The house was dull enough with only Aunt Tatchet to speak to; and the first few days of her coming down stairs, seemed to Rose the longest she had ever spent.

She had now plenty of time to reflect upon the past; and as she sat in her little chair by the fire, she recalled, one by one, the misfortunes that had come upon her since she had consulted the talking bird. The magic lantern, the gold watch, and last of all, how terrible, the fire, the fire! The dove had become quite hateful to her, and she determined as soon as ever she was able to run about as usual, to take it into the fields and let it escape.

Accordingly, the very first morning she was strong enough to go out alone, she tied on her bonnet, and with the cage in her hand, walked resolutely down the lane. The dove began to flutter about, as if to attract her attention; but Rose would not even look at it, and the thought of asking it a question never came into her head. She hurried along until she reached the stile where the old woman had disappeared, and here she resolved to open the cage door, and let the bird go.

"Fly away, dove," said she, "and never let me see you any more."

The dove needed no second bidding. It hopped from its perch, and spreading its wings, was gone in an instant.

"So you have parted with your talking bird, Miss Rose," said a croaking voice close to her ear; and the little girl, turning round, saw to her surprise, her old acquaintance, the tiny old woman. Where she had come from, Rose could not imagine; but there she stood, the same odd-looking figure as before, with the hump on her shoulders, and the piercing black eyes that seemed to look you through and through.

"Pray what is the reason you are letting it go?" continued she, peering into Rose's face.

"Because it has quite cured me of any wish to know what is going to happen," said Rose, speaking with some bitterness. "I have done nothing but get into scrapes ever since you gave me that talking bird."

"You are a silly child to let it go, for all that, Miss Rose," said the old woman; "you cannot imagine what it would have told you next."

"Ah! I should have been much better off if it had never told me anything," said Rose; "it has got me into disgrace with my Uncle, and made me behave ill to Margaret; and now she has gone away and left me," added she, with tears in her eyes.

"Never mind about that, Miss Wilton," said the old woman in a coaxing tone, "let me call the dove back, and just ask it what will happen next. Bless me! how astonished you would be if you knew."

"O pray let the dove alone," cried Rose, "I don't want to see it any more; and I had a great deal rather not be told anything beforehand."

"But you need not keep it," persisted the old woman, holding out her hand, "you can let it go again the very minute it has told you."

"No, no; I will not have the dove back even for a minute," said Rose, shutting the cage door, and preparing to return homeward.

"Have you quite made up your mind, Miss Rose?" said the old woman; "remember, you will not have another chance."

"I have quite made up my mind," said Rose firmly, and turning from her companion with a feeling of disgust.

The old woman frowned angrily, and shook her tiny fist. She stamped upon the ground, and then, as she had done before, abruptly disappeared.

Rose could see her no more; but from the branch of a tree, upstarted the pretty black dove, and fluttered a few times round the head of its mistress, as if in hopes she would put out her hand to catch it. Rose made no such attempt; and the bird, uttering a shrill cry, flew away, and was soon lost in the distance.

No sooner was it fairly gone, than Rose felt her heart grow light as a feather, and she skipped down the lane, merrily as on the day of her first encounter with the tiny old woman. It was a beautiful morning, and everything around her seemed in unison with her happy feelings. The trees had lost their covering of hoar frost, and no longer

looked bare and lifeless. Green leaves were bursting forth that told of spring days coming, and there was a perfume of violets in the air. The pond that had been crusted over with ice, sparkled in the bright rays of the sun, and it seemed as if the darkness and gloom of winter had completely passed away.

On Rose's return home, a delightful surprise awaited her. As she was taking off her bonnet, and congratulating herself on having got rid of the dove, who should come running into the room but Margaret.

"Rose, dear Rose!" cried she, nearly smothering her with kisses, "you cannot think how unhappy I have been without you."

"Unhappy in Uncle Wilton's pretty little cottage?" said Rose, warmly returning her sister's caress, and almost crying for joy at seeing her again. "O Margaret, that is quite impossible."

"I never enjoy myself anywhere away from you, Rose," said Margaret affectionately; "and I have done nothing but tease Uncle Wilton to bring me back."

"How good you always are, Margaret!" said Rose, kissing her again and again, "I wish I had not been so naughty and jealous; Uncle Wilton will never love me any more."

"Yes he will," cried Margaret joyfully, "he is not at all angry with you now. Do you know, Barbara has just been in to tell him all about her meddling with the slides, and how the gold watch got into your pocket. Uncle was so angry with her for not speaking out before."

"What! did Barbara meddle with the slides?" said Rose, a flush of joy spreading itself over her face.

"Yes, indeed, she went into the breakfast-room to peep, and pulled them all out of the box, and held them up to the candle to look. Just as she got to the last, Aunt Tatchet rang her bell, and off Barbara scampered, and left them strewed about on the floor."

"Then Uncle will see that I told the truth," said Rose, proudly.

"O yes, and he is very sorry that you should have been punished when you did not deserve it," said Margaret.

"But I did deserve to be punished," said Rose penitently, "for Barbara would never have meddled with the slides, or the gold watch either, unless I had told her about them."

"You tell her about them, Rose! but how did you know yourself?" asked Margaret.

"You may well look so surprised," said Rose, blushing deeply. "You will hardly believe how wicked I have been, and that I hid the dove after you had made me promise to let it go."

"What! the black dove that talked, and that you said could tell us what was going to happen?" exclaimed Margaret.

"Yes, and that the tiny old woman, like a witch, gave to me," replied Rose. "I hid it in the lumber-room, that I might ask it questions; and it told me what my Uncle's treat was going to be, and what present he meant to give me."

"O Rose, how could you do anything so wicked?" cried Margaret with a half shudder.

"It was very wicked, I know," said Rose; "but I have been punished enough, for everybody thought I had been peeping, and that got me into such disgrace. Besides, it nearly frightened me to death by telling me that the house was to be on fire."

"Did it tell you that?" asked Margaret, lowering her voice, and turning pale at the remembrance of the catastrophe.

"Yes, indeed," said Rose, "and I went flying down into the drawing-room, where Aunt Tatchet and Captain Wilton were sitting, after every body was gone to bed, and told them, only they did not believe it."

"And what did you do then, Rose?" asked Margaret, breathless with interest.

"I got our playthings together, and hid them in the wooden shed that was burnt down," continued Rose; "and I thought I would keep awake and watch, but I was so tired I fell asleep, and then the fire began."

"Uncle says the flames were first seen in that wooden shed," said Margaret, "and he is quite sure some mischievous person must have thrown a spark among the hay."

Rose stood a few moments unable to reply, for a terrible idea occurred to her.

"O Margaret," cried she, in a tone of anguish, "surely it could not be I who set the shed on fire!"

"Did you carry a candle into it, Rose?" asked Margaret, almost as much agitated as her sister, for the very same suspicion had crossed her mind.

"Yes, and I stood a long time with it in my hand, looking at the things I had hidden in the hay," said Rose, "O, what dreadful mischief I have done !

"Well, pray don't let us talk about it," said Margaret hastily, and afraid of making her sister ill again; "but how I wish you had let me open the window, and let that wicked dove fly away in the very beginning."

"It is too late to think of that now," said Rose sorrowfully; "but I little imagined what the end would be, when I hid it so carefully, and fed it with lumps of sugar. Oh, Margaret, you have had all the happiness and I have had all the punishment!"

And now the two little girls were summoned to the drawing-room, where Aunt Tatchet and Captain Wilton were sitting, apparently in deep consultation. Rose felt at first rather embarrassed at seeing her uncle again, but he addressed her with so much kindness, that all her uneasy feelings were dispelled in an instant.

"And so, after all, it was not my little Rose who meddled with the slides, and ran away with the gold watch," said he, patting her cheek; "I thought this open face of hers did not much look like storytelling."

"O no, I was quite certain Rose had not done it, all along!" said Margaret joyfully; "and Uncle, you will let her keep house for you now," added she in a coaxing tone.

"Why Margaret, what a hurry you are in to run away from me," said the Captain with an aggrieved air; "any one would think you did not wish to be my little house-keeper yourself."

"You know better than that, Uncle," cried Margaret climbing on his knee; "you know I love you with all my heart, but I cannot bear to have so much happiness myself, and poor Rose not have any at all."

Captain Wilton put on a look of great perplexity.

"I don't know what I can do, Margaret," said he; "you cannot be so unreasonable as to expect me to take you both."

"No, for then what would become of Aunt Tatchet, without any one to take care of her," said Margaret thoughtfully.

"But supposing Aunt Tatchet were to find some one else to take care of her, besides her two little nieces, Rose and Margaret?" asked the Captain.

"What do you mean, Uncle?" cried Rose and Margaret both at once.

"Miss Tatchet has had a long letter this morning from her brother," replied the Captain; "he has just lost his wife, and wants her to go and take care of him."

"But will Aunt Tatchet like to go?" asked Margaret in a hesitating tone.

"Yes, that I am sure she will," said the Captain; "he is her only brother, and she loves him very much indeed. But what is to be done with Rose, I cannot imagine."

"O Uncle, do not let us be separated," cried Margaret, caressing her Uncle in a manner that was quite irresistible; "I cannot be happy anywhere without Rose."

"But, perhaps Rose would be jealous, and what should I do then?" said the Captain.

"No, Uncle, I shall never be jealous again," said Rose

earnestly; "I am quite willing now that you should love Margaret best."

"Well, well, I suppose I must have two housekeepers instead of one," said the Captain playfully; "only Rose had better make haste and pack up her things, for I am going back almost directly."

The children were out of their wits for joy; and as for Rose, she could hardly believe her good fortune. They were very soon on their way to Captain Wilton's cottage, and laughed and talked so fast, that he had something to do to keep them in order. But when Rose found herself really there, her delight knew no bounds. There was the cottage, just as she had imagined it, with its roses and honeysuckles climbing over the porch, and its great great garden, that Aunt Tatchet had so often described. There, too, was the paddock before it, and even the ducks and geese swimming in the pond."

Many happy days were in store for Rose; and she so entirely regained her Uncle's good opinion, that in a few weeks, it would have been difficult to say which he loved the best. Every jealous feeling vanished for ever from her mind; and so convinced was she that the knowledge of the future is a dangerous thing, that she never ceased to rejoice in her ignorance of what was going to happen.

THE END.

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